

Cp613.94
L42s

Some factors concerning sterilization
based upon a study in Orange co.,
N.C.

The Library
of the
University of North Carolina



Collection of North Caroliniana

Endowed by
John Sprunt Hill
of the Class of 1889

Cp 613.94
L423

Reprinted from the North Carolina Medical Journal
Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 22-24, January, 1947

COPYRIGHT 1947 BY THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

SOME FACTORS CONCERNING
STERILIZATION BASED UPON A
STUDY IN ORANGE COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA

GEORGE H. LAWRENCE*

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

During the summer of 1945 the State Eugenics Board began a study in Orange County in an effort to find out as specifically as possible the extent of mental disease and mental deficiency in a fairly typical North Carolina county, and to secure as many pertinent data as might be available on each individual classified as mentally ill or mentally defective. Although the Eugenics Board, by reason of its official duties, is particularly interested in securing information bearing directly upon sterilization, it is also concerned with the total problem of the mentally diseased and the mentally deficient. It is hoped, therefore, that the Orange County study will bring to light several factors applicable both to the problem as a whole and to the program of sterilization, which is such an important part of any well balanced plan for the treatment and prevention of mental disease and mental defect.

At the outset, it must be stated that the study is by no means completed, and even

Read before the Section on Public Health and Education,
Medical Society of the State of North Carolina, Pinehurst,
May 3, 1946.

* Field Secretary, North Carolina Eugenics Board.

though it is expected that a report of findings will be submitted in June, there is still much that could be done in the matter of securing additional data from many and various sources which have presented themselves. At this time, however, it is possible to present some of the principal findings indicated by the data already at hand.

The present population of Orange County is approximately 24,000. If the ten most populous of the state's one hundred counties are excluded, Orange would be about average for all the rest in regard to many criteria, such as population, Negro-white ratio, per capita wealth, farm and industry, and taxable wealth.

The study has attempted to gather recorded data on individuals who have been declared by presumably competent authorities to be either mentally diseased or mentally deficient. The records consulted include those of the Eugenics Board, the Division of Psychiatric and Psychological Services of the State Board of Public Welfare, the commitments of the Clerk of the Superior Court to the State Hospitals, the State Hospitals, Caswell Training School, Selective Service Board, Public School Group Mental Tests, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Public Welfare, and the Emergency Relief Administration of Orange County.

Selective Service Rejections

A study of the Selective Service records shows that up to August, 1945, approximately 6,000 men between the ages of 18 and 38 had been registered in Orange

County. Of these, 2,431 were accepted for military service, 1,460 were rejected, and the remainder, about 2,100, were deferred for various reasons. Of the 1,460 rejections, 622, or 42.3 per cent, were for some sort of mental impairment. The diagnoses in these 622 cases were as follows:

	<i>No.</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Mental deficiency or borderline.....	357	57
Psychoneurosis	154	25
Constitutional psychopathic state ..	67	11
Epilepsy	28	4½
Mental disease	16	2½

It will be noted that 57 per cent of all the rejections on a mental basis were for mental subnormality. This figure may be too high, because 133 of the 357 were rejected on the grounds that they failed "to meet minimum intelligence standards." It is understood that this classification was often used at the induction centers when the primary cause for rejections was really illiteracy. Also because of various changes in regulations and quotas, the standards for acceptance into military service have not been consistently uniform. On the other hand, it is known that a considerable number of men accepted for military service subsequently failed to meet the test and had to be discharged. Unfortunately for the study, it was impracticable to secure data on those so discharged. In view of this factor it is possible that the number listed as mentally ill or defective is actually a minimum; this possibility is strengthened by the fact that, in men rejected for some obvious physical disability, the mental condition was often not seriously considered.

Since a typical characteristic of the mental defective is inability to meet the demands

of everyday living, it is not surprising that 167, or almost 47 per cent, of the 357 rejectees classified as mentally subnormal were members of families who have been clients of the County Department of Public Welfare. One hundred thirty-four, or 38 per cent, had court records.

Later the Eugenics Board plans to analyze the Selective Service data concerning the psychoneurotics, the constitutional psychopaths, the epileptics, and the mentally diseased.

Data from Other Sources

Thus far, data have been compiled, from the several other sources previously mentioned, on 336 individuals between 18 and 38, exclusive of the Selective Service Board rejectees. Of this number there are 233 definitely classifiable as mental defectives, 88 as mentally diseased, and 15 who have been sterilized because of physical defects, on the recommendation of the Department of Public Welfare. Thirty-three others out of the total of 336 have been sterilized under the authority of the Eugenics Board.

The group testing of all elementary school children in the county is still in process. Of the 2,900 thus far tested, 439—slightly more than 15 per cent—were found to have an intelligence quotient below 70. One hundred and eleven, or 3.8 per cent, had an I.Q. of 60 or less. These figures do not take into account the number of children absent on the days of testing, or not attending school because of mental deficiency. Obviously, not all of the school children with an I.Q. below 70 would be classified as feebleminded if indi-

vidual tests were made. At this stage of incomplete analysis, however, it appears probable that the results will confirm those of a study made of approximately 2000 school children in another North Carolina county in 1937, which indicated a higher proportion of mental defectives than had been shown in similar studies in other sections of the nation⁽¹⁾. It is realized that the validity of the school tests as applied to Negroes may be questioned, as the tests were developed and standardized chiefly upon the basis of white children.

The Problem of Mental Deficiency

Although the findings of the study do not minimize the problems of the psychoneurotic, the constitutional psychopathic, and the psychotic groups of the population, they do emphasize the immensity of the problem of the mental defectives, who, though a less spectacular group, constitute a tremendous burden upon society. The results of the study thus far clearly indicate that mental defectives tend to have large families, several members within the family group often being affected; that their economic status is usually low, and their physical health poor. The incidence of court cases and of dependence upon public relief is high among this group. The proportion of mental defectives is higher among rural than among urban dwellers, and higher among Negroes than in the white population.

North Carolina's Sterilization Law and the Medical Profession

North Carolina has a good and workable

1. A Study of Negro and White Pupils in Piedmont North Carolina, Special Bulletin No. 16, North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare, 1938.

sterilization law; it applies only to the mentally diseased, the feebleminded, and the epileptics. The Eugenics Board is conservative in its consideration of the cases officially brought before it, and the required procedures are as careful as can possibly be devised. Almost all cases coming to the attention of the Eugenics Board are by consent of the patient or the next of kin. The county superintendent of public welfare is the official petitioner for cases referred by the county; the initiation of proceedings in the case of an inmate of a state institution is the responsibility of the institutional head. Sterilization for physical defects is not governed by legislation, and therefore is left entirely in the hands of members of the medical profession. The law itself contains the following provisions⁽²⁾:

"Nothing contained in this act shall be construed so as to prevent the medical or surgical treatment for sound therapeutic reasons of any person in this state by a physician or surgeon licensed in this state, which treatment may incidentally involve the nullification or destruction of the reproductive functions."

"That nothing in this act shall, in any way, interfere with any surgeon in the removal of diseased pathological tissue from any patient."

It has been the experience of several public welfare workers that a considerable number of the mentally defectives and their close kinsmen would be favorable to the idea of sterilization if they understood the medical implications. Practitioners of medicine are certainly in a much better position than public welfare workers to provide an acceptable explanation of the different types of operations and their effects, especially in the

2. North Carolina Sterilization Law, 35:52; 35:56.

matter of distinguishing between castration and sterilization. Would it not be a wise and humane undertaking for physicians and surgeons to explain the procedure and urge sterilization for their mentally defective patients? It is a rather simple matter for the doctor then to refer such patients to the superintendent of public welfare.

In one of the case studies in Orange County is found the following statement by a local physician:

"Mrs. X., who is 24 years old, has given birth to eleven children, of whom four are living. The first and last were stillbirths. Live twins and triplets were born in less than one year. Six children were born in about one year and nine months.

"The economic status is such that it is difficult to feed and clothe the four living ones. Both mother and father are mentally sub-normal.

"In my opinion a sterilization operation would accomplish definite good."

One wonders why this physician had taken no earlier action, especially since he had attended the previous births. Actually, his statement was given at the request of the Public Welfare Department, which had been called upon for emergency hospitalization for Mrs. X.

Conclusion

In spite of the findings of the Orange County study, the Eugenics Board has no intention of advocating a wholesale program of sterilization. It is believed that much good can be accomplished, however, by greater enlightenment of the public, and by the increased use of the existing channels for sterilization. Surely sterilization is an exceedingly important part of any well rounded program for combatting the problems of mental deficiency and mental disease.

FOR USE ONLY IN
THE NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION

UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL



00051197024

